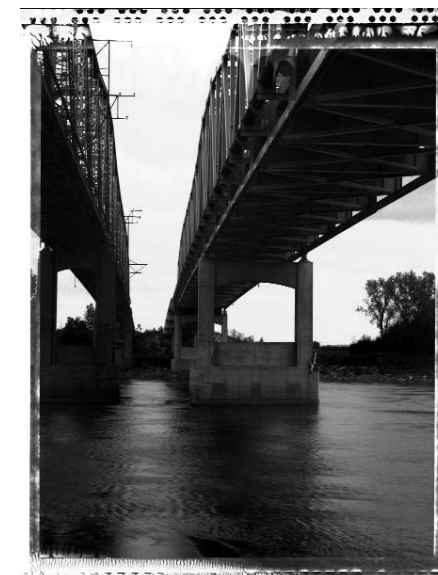




# History In The Remaking.

*Artisans along the rural Missouri River are honing nearly forgotten skills in the "not-so-lost" arts.*

STORY & PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK ANDERSON



One hundred and fifty years ago, a new set of clothes for most Missourians — or for that matter, anything else made of cloth — was a really big deal. It was inconceivable that a mere century later, most of their descendants would take it for granted that a variety of choices in ready-made, ready-to-wear garments, along with linens, draperies and rugs would be available at any department store. This month, visitors to Liberty can take a step back in time to the days when wool was still being spun by hand. Some of Missouri's finest "lost" arts and crafts fibre artists will be demonstrating and selling the wares of yesteryear.

Spinners and weavers were well known throughout the 1800's, but as technology progressed, the process became more efficient as a machine operation, and the art of making fibre

products by hand began to decline. Today what was once a way of life for most households has now become a craft and an art form practiced by a handful of skilled artisans.

Merle and Pat Miller, of Miller's Woolly Acres in Kingsville, Missouri, are examples of such craftsmanship. The Millers specialize in spinning wool shorn from their own sheep into shawls and spools of raw, undyed, and dyed yarns. They also sell yards of unspun wool, so that others called to the spinning avoca-

tion can make their own yarn and products.

Pat Miller is the spinner of the duo, and Merle the shepherd. "I haven't taught him how to spin yet," Miller said of her husband. "I spin the yarn, then weave it into our product. Merle does a great deal where the sheep are concerned, tending to the feeding, exercise, and shearing."

Miller got her start in the business about 15 years ago. She was visiting Branson, Missouri and observed a woman spinning.

"I saw what she was doing, and it interested me so much," Miller says. "I thought I liked the idea of spinning, so I decided to take it up as a hobby." Soon after their visit, Merle and her husband joined a group called the Osage Spinners and have been spinning wool ever since.

The spinners in the Millers' group dress in period costume, and make appearances at "lost arts" shows



**Pat Miller specializes in hand working spun wool shorn from sheep on her farm.**

throughout Missouri and Kansas. They set up their spinning wheels in individual booths, display their handi-craft, and spin, demonstrating the making of their product for their customers. It's apparent in talking with them that the Millers enjoy what they do. They consider spinning a business as well as a hobby and have become highly skilled in the craft. The Millers will demonstrate their fibre arts in Liberty the weekends of October 16, 23, and 30.

Dee Wolfe and Ken Bailey, of Fairwinds Farm in Holden, MO, will also provide demonstrations during the last three weekends in October. Having raised several different sheep for most of their married lives, Wolfe and Bailey ultimately decided to hand work the wool they had shorn from their flock. A neighbor of Pat and Merle Miller, Wolfe was introduced to spinning, and the two frequently "craft" together at shows.

Wolfe considers their move into the world of arts and crafts as inevitable, having worked at the Kansas City Zoo for six years and, along with Bailey, volunteering at

*Missouri Town 1855* for five years. "Everything kind of blended together," Wolfe says, "Pat and I get along great, and spinning lets us do what we want. We're crafters."

Wolfe spins for a variety of different items, including scarves, hats, sheep figurines, and yarn. "We sell everything— from raw wool right off the sheep, to finished wool products. People can basically get anything they could possibly want or need from us, where sheep and wool are concerned."

Wolfe and Bailey enjoy dressing in period costume while demonstrating their craft for their customers. "Spinning at shows and festivals allows us to expose people to a part of life that's disappearing. We just want to bring some old time into the new," Wolfe said.

Wolfe, Bailey, and the Millers use all natural dyes for their wool, including cochinille, walnut hulls, and onion skins.

Another crafting duo uses a different type of material. Lyle and Gladys Dietzscholds are rug weavers. They have been weaving for nearly 20 years,

and in that time have attended craft shows and festivals all over Missouri. "You're not gonna get rich at it, but it's some extra spending money," Lyle Dietzscholds said. The Dietzscholds make their rugs out of several different cloth materials, ranging from denim to polyester, but also incorporate old quilts, blankets, corduroy, and many types of discarded shirts, skirts, and clothing.

All of their material is thoroughly washed before they begin weaving, and washed again when it reaches finished form. The Dietzscholds make place-mats and door runners in addition to the rugs. Their many loyal customers believe that the woven rugs are as beautiful as they are functional and frequently display them in their homes.

For many Missourians, the crafters provide a means of rediscovering the day-to-day life of yesteryear by bringing the past into the present. The crafters welcome the natural curiosity most visitors have for these dying skills and it's a sure bet that questions about spinning or weaving will be met with a genial answer and a lesson in history. ■